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Motorsport

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Audi clinches ALMS title with Miami victory

By winning the inaugural "Grand Prix of the Americas" Audi has prematurely clinched the manufacturer's title of the American Le Mans Series (ALMS) and achieved another hat-trick: After 2000 and 2001 Audi has won the ALMS title for a third consecutive time.

In the penultimate race of the season on the new street circuit in Miami (Florida), the four Audi works drivers Frank Biela, Rinaldo Capello, Tom Kristensen and Emanuele Pirro performed a master piece in front of an impressive crowd: In an incident-packed race that saw five caution periods, they brought the two Infineon Audi R8 sportscars to the finish without any damage – something which is not regarded as a matter of course on the narrow track surrounded by concrete walls.

The Miami victory went to Frank Biela and Emanuele Pirro who already had won at Laguna Seca two weeks ago. With their success the German-Italian duo improved to third and fourth in the driver's championship. They also achieved a first by completing the whole race distance on a single set of tyres proving once more the outstanding qualities of the Infineon Audi R8.

A stop-and-go penalty imposed against Tom Kristensen for touching a lapped car less than eight minutes before the end of the race cost Audi a possible 1-2 victory. Despite that Kristensen was able to finish third and even caught up the second placed Cadillac.

Johnny Herbert and Stefan Johansson from Audi's customer team Champion Racing also lost their chances to finish on the podium due to a stop-and-go penalty after Johansson clipped an air hose in the Champion pits with the rear wing.

With their third position Tom Kristensen and Rinaldo Capello defended the first two positions in the overall classification of the ALMS. With Kristensen, Capello, Biela, Pirro and Herbert only Audi drivers have a chance to win the driver's title in the final race of the season at Road Atlanta next Saturday.

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Quotes after the race

Frank Biela (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "It went just perfectly. When we did not change tyres during our pitstop, I was a little bit worried that we could get into trouble by the end of the race, but the tyres lasted. We had a perfect car and could pull away permanently during the race. Concerning the championship, we did not give up our hopes, but under normal circumstances we do not have a chance anymore. But you never know."

Emanuele Pirro (Infineon Audi R8 #1): "This is a special victory, especially under these circumstances – track, heat, traffic and on top of it we decided not to change tyres. The car was great and I could pull away from everybody. In the end there was no more grip left, especially at the rear. The last few laps were just a nightmare. For the championship I think it is too late for us. All we can do is to wait for a miracle, but still we can be proud of what we have done this year."

Rinaldo Capello (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "The most important thing is that we made it to the podium. Of course it was a shame that we lost the second place so shortly before the end. The 'red' car was a little bit faster today. When I drove behind Frank, I got stuck in the traffic. But later also Tom was not able to match Emanuele's speed, so Frank and Emanuele earn this victory."

Tom Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8 #2): "We knew this race would be a survival race. We survived very well and I think we drove quite cleverly. When I was following Emanuele I had to cruise half a lap behind slower cars under yellow flags. After that I took it easy just to get it home. The stop-and-go penalty is arguable, but not the timing. It was almost one hour after the incident and just before the end. For me this is unprofessional. We can be lucky to be third. Thanks to the boys, the car was perfect."

Johnny Herbert (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "Our strategy was to stay out longer than the 'factory' Audis and hope for another yellow which thankfully came after I'd managed to build up an advantage in the lead. The grip was pretty consistent from the tyres for the first half of the race but we decided to change the fronts. It's just a shame that we did not finish the race on the podium after the stop-and-go penalty."

Stefan Johansson (ADT Champion Audi R8 #38): "The air hose got caught around the rear wing as I exited the pits and I was forced to serve a stop-go penalty dropping us from third to fifth place which was very disappointing for the team. In the closing stages I dropped back because I had very little grip."

Ralf Jüttner, Technical Director Team Audi Sport North America: "A big compliment to our four drivers. To come through the race without mistakes on a track like this is a big achievement. I did not believe that we would be able to do so and really thought there would be many incidents, involving also our cars. We are happy that nothing was damaged. Tom did a tactically clever race with the championship in his mind. I can't say if the stop-and-go penalty was justified. However, Tom still managed to finish third and even almost caught the Cadillac."

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Dr Wolfgang Ullrich, Head of Audi Sport: "Our drivers drove a great race and did not cause any damage despite being the fastest during the whole race. Of course the many caution periods always destroyed the gained advantage. The stop-and-go penalty we got so shortly before the end is not comprehensible for me. But despite that Tom is now almost unreachable in the championship. The whole Audi team can be proud of winning the manufacturer's title. This third consecutive success was not as easy to achieve as many believe."

Race results

1. Biela/Pirro (Infineon Audi R8)	122 laps
2. Angelelli/Lehto (Cadillac)	+ 14.021s
3. Capello/Kristensen (Infineon Audi R8)	+ 14.536s
4. Magnussen/Brabham (Panoz)	+ 48.620s
5. Herbert/Johansson (Audi R8)	- 1 lap
6. Goossens/Ave (Riley&Scott-Elan)	- 1 lap
7. Bernard/Collard (Cadillac)	- 2 laps
8. Knight/Hürtgen/Block (MG Lola)	- 3 laps
9. Fellows/O'Connell (Chevrolet)	- 3 laps
10. Pilgrim/Collins (Chevrolet)	- 4 laps

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